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Throssel Hole Priory is a training monastery, parish church and retreat centre following the Sōtō Zen Buddhist tradition. The Priory is affiliated with Shasta Abbey, whose Spiritual Director is Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, O.B.C., Abbess. Shasta Abbey, Headquarters of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives of the Sōtō Zen Church, is located in Mt. Shasta, California, U.S.A. The Priors of Throssel Hole Priory are disciples of Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett and follow her teaching

## *Throssel Hole Priory and Journal*

*The Journal of Throssel Hole Priory* is published as a service to people who are seriously interested in the practice of Buddhism. Through the Journal the Priory's members and friends share their understanding and meditation experience. We invite our readers to submit material arising from the practice of meditation to be considered for publication. Opinions expressed in each article are those of its author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Priors. The Journal is published bi-monthly (or if less frequently with an equivalently greater number of pages).

PRIORS:      Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke, O.B.C.  
                 Rev. Teigan Stevens, O.B.C.

TRUSTEES:   Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, O.B.C., Abbess  
                 Rev. Rōshi Jishō Perry, O.B.C.  
                 Rev. Teacher Daishin Morgan, O.B.C.

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## Address Correspondence To:

The Priors,  
Throssel Hole Priory,  
Carrshield, Nr. Hexham.  
Northumberland, NE47 8AL  
(Telephone *Whitfield* (049 85) 204

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## BIRUSHANOFŪ, THE COSMIC BUDDHA OF ZEN

Rev. Rōshi Kyogen Carlson, O.B.C.

*This article was written in response to a reader's letter questioning the synonymous usage of the terms Cosmic Buddha and God in a recent Journal article. If you ever have any questions on material appearing in our magazine, or have suggestions of article topics which would be helpful to your training, please let us know. -ed.*

What is the Cosmic Buddha? In this we have yet another way of asking the ultimate question of Zen. Buddhism is, to me, the most fulfilling, satisfying and beautiful religion in the world precisely because this question can be asked in as many ways as there are people to ask it, and there are as many answers as well. What is more, it is commonly accepted by all the schools of Buddhism that correctly understood, no question or answer stands against any other, so Buddhists spend little or no time arguing over doctrine. The emphasis is instead upon each person finding the Truth for himself.

Every day in a Zen temple the trainees recite the names of the Ten Buddhas. The first is Birushanofū, Dharma Itself. Birushanofū is the Dharmakaya, or Dharma body of the Buddha, and it is He whom we call in English the Cosmic Buddha. He is the personification of ultimate reality, absolute Truth, and is the fundamental principle of Dharma. This principle permeates all things, and because of this manifests itself in countless myriad ways. It is like a jewel with innumerable facets. As we look into each one in turn we see a different aspect of the Buddha, and yet through each facet we see the center of the same

jewel. Birushanofū is just as this.

Through one facet of this jewel we see the Truth manifesting as the impersonal laws of the universe. It comprises the physical laws of science but also the spiritual laws which are summarized in the Five Laws of the Universe (see *The Book of Life*, pp. 4-8):

1. The physical world is not answerable to my personal will.
2. All created things undergo change (impermanence).
3. The Law of Karma is inevitable and inexorable.
4. Without fail evil is vanquished and good prevails; this too is inexorable.
5. All beings have an intuitive knowledge of Buddha Nature.

There are times when the impersonal nature of Dharma is extremely comforting. When we fall to the ground it is nice to know that gravity is not out to get us. When correctly understood, gravity becomes the principle upon which the graceful movements of dancing are based. It is important to realize that the man who falls and the man who dances are both expressing perfectly the law of gravity. Enlightenment is also like this. When we train ourselves, we are dancing to the law of Dharma and show it in the world. But no matter what we do we express the Dharma perfectly, because even when we fall in training we are demonstrating what not to do.

Why is it then that there is any need to personify the Dharma as the Buddha Birushanofū? Why do some Zen masters personify the Dharma by lovingly referring to God? It is because as we train ourselves we discover that we are not simply dancing in obedience to



an impersonal law. Eventually we discover that we are dancing *with* It, and that It is leading! It is very difficult at this point to call the Dharma an "It." Here we discover another facet of the jewel. Through this facet we see that Birushanofū possesses an enormously compassionate and loving heart. Because of this Compassion, Love, and Wisdom appear in the world and have the names of Kanzeon, Fugen, and Monju Bodhisattvas. These are aspects of the Buddha Himself, and appear as separate forms because of the Five Laws of the Universe.

Remember that Birushanofū is another name of the Dharmakaya, or the Dharma body of the Buddha. D.T. Suzuki wrote lovingly of the Dharmakaya as a living being with definite attributes:

The Dharmakaya is a soul, a willing and knowing being, one that is will and intelligence, thought and action. It is not an abstract metaphysical principle like Suchness, but it is a living spirit that manifests in nature as well as in thought. Buddhists ascribe to the Dharmakaya innumerable merits and virtues and an absolute perfect intelligence, and make it an inexhaustible fountainhead of love and compassion.

(From *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* as reprinted in Mahayana Buddhism by Beatrice Lane Suzuki, New York, Macmillan, 1972, p. 59.)

Much of what D.T. Suzuki is saying about the Dharmakaya is also expressed in the Avatamsaka Sutra, part of which he translated:

The Dharmakaya, though manifesting itself in the triple world (past, present, and future), is free from impurities and desires. It unfolds itself here, there, and everywhere, responding to the call of karma. It is not an individual reality, it is not a false existence, but is universal and pure. It comes from nowhere, it goes to nowhere; it does not assert itself, nor is it sub-

ject to annihilation. It is forever serene and eternal. It is the One, devoid of all determinations. This Body of Dharma has no boundary, no quarters, but is embodied in all bodies. Its freedom or spontaneity is incomprehensible, its spiritual presence in things corporeal is incomprehensible. All forms of corporeality are involved therein; it is able to create all things. Assuming any concrete material body as required by the nature and condition of karma, it illuminates all creations. Though it is the treasure of intelligence it is void of particularity. There is no place in the universe where this Body forever remains. It is free from all opposites and contraries, yet it is working in all things to lead them to Nirvana.

It benefits us by destroying evils, all good things thus being quickened to growth; it benefits us with its universal illumination which vanquishes the darkness of ignorance harboured in all beings; it benefits us through its great compassionate heart which saves and protects all beings; it benefits us through its great loving heart which delivers all beings from the misery of birth and death; it benefits us by the establishment of a good religion whereby we are strengthened in our moral activities; it benefits us by giving us a firm belief in the truth which cleanses all our spiritual impurities; it benefits us by helping us to understand the doctrine by virtue of which we are led to disavow the law of causation; it benefits us with a divine vision which enables us to observe the metempsychosis (another way of saying spiritual blocks) of all beings; it benefits us with an intellectual light which unfolds the mind-flowers of all beings; it benefits us with an aspiration whereby we are enlivened to practice all that constitutes Buddhahood. Why? Because the Sun-Body (Vairocana, another name for Birushanofū Buddha) of the



Tathagata universally emits the rays of the Light of Intelligence. (Ibid., pp. 59-60.)

It is clear from this passage in the Avatamsaka Sutra that Birushanofū is much more than an abstract impersonal law. In this He embodies everything that God means to many Christians. Beatrice Lane Suzuki, wife of D.T. Suzuki, in offering an explanation of the doctrine of the Trikaya, or Three Bodies of the Buddha, wrote:

In philosophical Christianity God is considered in his unknowable aspect as the Godhead, the source of all, yet not realisable except through mystical experience. This is the Dharmakaya (Body of Truth). That beings may come in contact with him he becomes God as usually known to all Christian believers; this corresponds to Sambhogakaya (Body of Bliss). But ordinary people need something more tangible and require a living personality. This is the Nirmanakaya (Transformation Body, i.e. the Cosmic Buddha appearing as Shakyamuni Buddha) to Buddhists and Christ to Christians. (Mahayana Buddhism, New York, MacMillan Co., 1972, p. 62.)

I know that there are many people, both Buddhist and Christian, who would argue vehemently with the equating of the Buddhist teaching of the Trikaya with Christian doctrine. It is not my purpose to prove anything on that one way or the other, precisely because as stated earlier, the point is for each person to discover the truth for himself. However, for the sake of easing the minds of those who have problems with the idea that the Cosmic Buddha may be the same thing as the Christian God, there are several aspects of the Dharmakaya as described in the Avatamsaka which I feel it would be good to emphasize. The Sutra declares that the Dharmakaya, Birushanofū Buddha, is not an individual reality but is embodied in all bodies, yet He is able to create all things. The universe becomes, yet He forever remains. This is to



say that nothing is separate from Him in any way, yet His existence does not depend upon creation. The Truth exists, the Dharmakaya or Cosmic Buddha IS, whether the universe exists or not. In some ways this is a mystery or kōan, but if you listen with your heart rather than your head it is quite obvious this must be so. The Cosmic Buddha as described by Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett is not a being yet not not a being. It can be said that the Cosmic Buddha has an existence beyond that of creation, yet it may not be said that He is separate from it. Because of His existence beyond creation He has attributes similar to a personality, which are actually the essence of reality, the way things are, or Dharma. The Avatamsaka describes His compassionate and loving heart and His willingness to respond to the needs of karma. The nature of Dharma is this willingness. The Cosmic Buddha must be understood in just this way.

Whether or not one can say that the Cosmic Buddha and the Christian God are identical depends upon one's understanding of them. To many people coming to Buddhism from a Judeo-Christian background this question is no small matter. So often people seeking to re-establish a spiritual foundation to their lives are at odds with something in their religious upbringing and are afraid of finding the same pitfalls in Buddhism. One very common difficulty involves a concept as God that is very prevalent in Christianity but which I do not believe is in any way fundamental to it. The first part of this concept is the idea that God is wholly "other", that all of creation, and we as part of creation, are completely separate from God. Second is the idea that God is willfully arbitrary and acts upon His creation vengefully, compassionately, indifferently or humorously, according to His mood. Implicit in this is the idea that our thoughts and actions affect those moods and bring about Divine intervention in our lives. He becomes a Cosmic father-figure in a very worldly sense, one that can be petitioned for favors, angered and placated. To all who have worries that Buddhism may teach that the Cosmic Buddha is such a being,

fear not. Such concepts simply have no place in Buddhism, and if you study the teachings carefully you will see that this is so. It should also be said that nothing like that has ever been taught at Shasta Abbey. However I should emphasize that in order to get beyond an intellectual understanding of Buddhism, it is essential to become fully aware of the fact that there is something far greater than ourselves which we cannot possibly hope to comprehend intellectually. As the source of intelligence It is far smarter than we are. It requires a respect that is true religious devotion, rather than intellectual investigation, in order to understand It. When we realize our relationship to It, devotional terms such as "Cosmic Buddha", "God", or "Lord of the House" arise naturally within us. What may be a meaningful expression of the Truth for you, however, may not be so for someone else, but the Buddhist way is not to reject any honest expression of it. That's why the Buddhist canon is over one hundred volumes long. One hundred volumes of scripture may seem like a lot of ways of saying the same thing, but because there are so many facets to the Jewel of the Dharma, each expression is considered to be important. For instance it is valuable to be aware of the impersonal nature of the Truth which is called the Dharma. We also need to become aware of the Truth manifesting within ourselves which comes as a still small voice; this is called the Lord of the House. But after that we must still let go of our egocentric self and let the Lord of the House guide us, and begin to manifest Buddha Nature. Then we can recognize the Buddha Nature appearing in all things which is Birushanofū Buddha, Dharma itself. Although each of these terms in some way expresses the same thing, each has its own significance and needs to be understood. Because of this it is helpful to study Buddhist teachings in detail. There is no conflict in these teachings from the Theravadin which emphasizes Nirvana, the state of being one with the Truth, to Mahayana, which goes into the nature of Truth, to Zen which emphasize practice.



The beauty of Buddhism is that because of these many ways of expressing the Truth, almost everyone can find some Buddhist teaching that strikes an inner chord within them.

On the other hand, if there is some piece of Buddhist teaching that you just cannot accept, remember that all truly religious teachings can only be understood from the inside out. Therefore whether you call the Truth of Zen "It", "That Which Is", "Dharmakaya", "God" or "Allah" makes no difference, but if you understand with your head, you will constantly be arguing with those who use a different term. If something makes no sense to you now, just put it on a back-burner in your mind without rejecting it, and get on with your training. Who knows? Maybe one day something sitting on a back-burner will suddenly make sense and become the most important piece of teaching you ever received.

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## JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AND RENEWALS

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## FEAR AND DESPAIR

Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke, O.B.C.

The Precepts are an essential part of the practice of Buddhism. The Precepts are one side of the gate and Meditation is the other. One without the other is a dead end. For many of us coming out of a Judeo-Christian background, the Precepts may seem to be just another strait-jacket of "Thou shalt not(s)". At first we can only follow them with the faith that our teacher knows what she is talking about; with the faith that by following this path we will come to understand in our hearts what is really good to do. The Precepts are simply an expression of the way an enlightened being acts and by following them to the best of our ability we come to learn to express our own Buddha nature.

At Shasta Abbey we read the Precepts everyday whilst making Gasshō. I used to find this one of the most difficult things that I "had" to do. I had always tried to be such a "good" person, I was afraid of not being perfect, and the Precepts were, seemingly, continuously battering at me to be more perfect, to pull the moral corset a bit tighter still, until I literally began to feel that I couldn't breathe. Something in me desperately wanted to do the very best I could and the despair that arose from continuously being forced to read the evidence of my failure was sometimes overwhelming. I got to where I just simply couldn't face other people and desperately wanted to avoid that morning reading period. At the time I didn't know what was going on. It is also very interesting that what was happening at the Abbey during my earliest months there, seemed to be the "perfect" reinforcer for me of fear and



despair. I promise you that your own suffering will follow you in your training until you learn to deal with it. This is a gift of the Lord of the House.

I was so often exhausted from this constant tension, this constant vigilance directed at rooting out my imperfections, that I found it difficult to cope with the world around me.

In meditation we are taught to allow things (thought, emotions, perceptions, sensations) to arise and to allow them to pass. I was trying to deal with my own greeds, hates, and delusions through fear - by not allowing them to arise. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to deal with them if they did arise. Here we begin to get to the root of the thing. I didn't trust myself. I did not have faith in my own Buddha nature. This lack of self-confidence also manifested itself in all my dealings with other people and even objects. I struggled in maintenance at the Abbey for two years. It seemed like I was continually being asked to do something about which I knew nothing and with which I felt I couldn't deal. This was also a gift.

Repression (not allowing things to arise) is an interesting phenomena. By the very act of repressing we give energy to the things with which we are trying to deal. When I wasn't letting it out and while I was giving it energy at the same time, I was effectively (quite effectively, I might add) creating a pressure cooker. When the pressure (tension) got to where I couldn't stand it any longer I would do things that I had learned in the past could be somewhat relaxing - like eating too much, or "having" to go lie down, or in some other way desperately try to distract myself. After the crisis had passed I would experience the despair of not having faced whatever needed to be faced and the fear that this cycle would just continue.

One of the interesting aspects of fear is that one may end up doing the right thing for the wrong reason. When I discovered that fear was no longer something with which I wished to control myself, fear arose that I would no longer be able to control myself. This came from a basic misunderstanding of meditation and of my own strengths. In meditation we allow things to arise and we allow them to pass, but in so doing that does not mean that we have to act on them. It is very important to understand this point. There is a space between the arising of some desire, emotion or thought and our acting upon it. For those in the world of animals, this space is not recognized and whatever arises is, as much as possible, immediately put into action. Some people think of this as being spontaneous. Through meditation, we can learn to be aware of this space and we can also learn that it is *our choice* whether we act upon whatever arises. The real spontaneity is in "spontaneously", without argument, listening to our heart and doing whatever is *GOOD*, always being guided by the Precepts and always with the awareness that we could be wrong. Meditation never guarantees that we will not make mistakes in fact, training is in being willing to do whatever needs to be done even though we know that we will make mistakes and also being willing to learn from those mistakes. Most of us have been very happy occasionally - so happy that we may have felt like doing something foolish in public. Something in us knows that it would be better not to make fools of ourselves but at the same time we don't need to repress the joy that we are feeling. The same thing can apply to anger or despair or fear just as well.

So constantly I had this dull anxiety with me that made life more than I wished to bear. I did have this vague hope that if I could just stick it out long enough within my own personal hell without breaking the Precepts too badly that I might have a kenshō and then "all my troubles would be over".



So all of my energy was going into the fear of not being perfect, the fear of having to cope with a world that I really wasn't capable of dealing with (and if I let it show, maybe others would realize that I really couldn't do it and I would be asked to leave) and all the despair that arose out of that. Until, that is, the day when I realized that fear and despair were as much breaking the Precepts as were anger and lying. I was stunned. Without realizing it I had been "taking refuge" in the delusions of fear and despair rather than taking refuge in the Three Treasures. And then I was incredibly relieved. I no longer had to pay any attention to those two delusions.

It's a funny thing - most people are very willing to try to keep the Precepts that prevent harm to others but many people, including myself, seem totally unaware of the Precepts which have to do with not harming oneself. Most of us may be amazed, also, to learn that people are afraid or despairing because they want to be. How many times have I gotten myself into a situation which caused tension or anxiety, fear or despair? And it always seemed that these feelings just proved the importance of dealing with the situation, when all the time what I first needed to do was simply drop the tension or fear or despair. To do this I found that I first needed to grow faith. I did this by doing the best that I could (that's all that anyone can do - and no more is asked of anyone) to train everyday. I often did a terrible job but I came to realize that as long as I was doing the best that I could that was all that was required. I also came to realize that it was simply my judgment of what I had done or not done that was often at the heart of the matter. As it says in the Shasta Abbey Book of Ceremonies in "Visitation and Exhortation of the Dying" on p.46:

Do not, through feelings of unworthiness, try to flee because of your past actions, do not

judge yourself before the Lord for in Pure Love your past actions are but dreams. Love is Love; do not judge Love by your standards of yourself for this is to cling to a separate self which is pure illusion.

Essentially then I was setting myself up above the Lord of the House. It's as if I wanted to make all the right decisions myself so that what I took to the Lord of the House was completely cleaned up already. In a sense then I couldn't even ask the Lord of the House for help because then my "secret" of imperfection would be out of the bag. I was also afraid to ask my seniors for help for the same reason. Then Rev. Zenji began talking about "offering all things up" to the Lord of the House. I didn't understand that at all at first. It felt easy and good to offer positive things up. I remember though, when I first had an inkling of what this was about. I was feeling particularly joyful for no apparent reason and so I offered this up. And it went. It left me. For a second I was stunned. And then I felt cheated. I had offered up this joy but I certainly didn't expect it to be taken! After I had gotten over my indignation I began to understand better what offering up was all about. This was something that I was honestly willing to offer to the Lord of the House without holding back, without thinking that it's not good enough. And the offering was accepted, although I had kind of hoped that maybe we could share it or something.

I began to realize that if I really wanted to take this seriously I would have to be willing to offer all things up to the Cosmic Buddha, even my anger, depair, sexual desire, fear, etc. This came to a kind of head one day when I was really angry with everyone and everything and maybe I'll leave, I'll show them and nobody cares anyway. I'm not sure why - maybe as much to prove people wrong as anything I went into the Zendo and was still and I offered up this anger - and it went. Suddenly I was very still and I understood then what one of the



seniors had told me. That this anger, or fear or whatever is not really me. I knew that the stillness was the real self and that I had simply been feeding the anger to keep it alive. I was very grateful for that knowledge.

Now let me say here, in my experience offering something up does not necessarily mean that you will no longer feel the thing or be affected by it. It does mean that if you are truly willing to stop clinging to or pushing away from this thing it will stop controlling you. Sometimes I find that this willingness has to literally be renewed constantly. Basically it is just the continuous coming back - to just sitting still, to stopping feeding this thing that seems to have me by the throat - that is the heart of our meditation.

I had been aware that tension affected many aspects of my life but before I started to train I didn't understand the source of the tension. I am now beginning to. Fear is a funny thing. If it is your "karmic rut" it's not really necessary to have a situation that raises fear within you; it can be that fear is always present and it is simply applied to whatever situation arises. It can be, in effect, your standard reaction to the world. This can obviously warp your view of reality and your own view of yourself, and it can also cause a great deal of suffering.

Sometimes in a deluded attempt to deal with my own fear I simply refused to look at certain situations - to admit that they existed. I remember some of my first attempts at serving in the Zendo as a postulant. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the process, at Shasta Abbey we eat while seated in the meditation hall - facing outwards, not inwards. Postulants and novices serve the food to all in the hall. This must be done quickly, carefully, and efficiently. It is an excellent aid to meditation - if your mind wanders you may pour hot soup in someone's lap. Anyway, I was frightened and didn't want

to make any mistakes (especially where everyone could see - that I wasn't perfect), so when I dropped some food on the floor I quickly (and almost unconsciously) kicked it under the serving cart, hoping that nobody had seen. And then, of course my co-server and I picked up the cart to move on to the next two people. Well, there lay my karma and for the first time it really began to dawn on me that one cannot simply sweep karma under the rug. It's amazing how long it takes for some things to sink. By refusing to look at our mistakes and to try to deal with them we have cut ourselves off from the possibility of doing something about ourselves, for if we are afraid to look to see what needs to be done, afraid of what we might see or need to do, how can we possibly do anything.

One thing that fear teaches us is to be sensitive of others, after all, if you are not, they might hit you or something. Once you've begun to deal with fear you may find that that sensitivity can be useful. It may be that it can help with the Three Pure Precepts. In How to Grow a Lotus Blossom, Rev. Zenji sets down her understanding of the Precepts. On page 40 she writes of the third Pure Precept - "Do Good for Others.":

Do not set up a chain of causation that will cause others to do wrong; do not do that which will cause another to grieve; do not do that which will result in [your] creating karma for another being; do not accidentally set the wheel of karma in motion.

This may be an excellent place to positively use the sensitivity born out of fear. First, however, you need to begin to get yourself out of the way.

Fear and despair may arise from a sense of inadequacy, a feeling of not being able to cope with the world. In a sense this is taking natural spiritual humility to an extreme. Rev. Zenji has said, in a

recent lecture:

"Do not debase yourself and do not puff yourself up. If you cannot believe that you too possess the Divine Light, you are again in duality. One has to be very careful of humility, an incredibly dangerous pitfall. At the same time humility is absolutely essential."

Know then that there is no safe place to hide. If you truly wish to do something about your own suffering you must start from where you are. Your sticking your head in the sand will help no one. All you can do is just get started and the best time to do that is now.

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## TRANSPORTATION TO THE PRIORY

If you would like to visit the Priory more often but have found lack of transportation to be a difficulty the following may be of interest to you. We have found that people driving to retreats often have room to spare. If you can come to Throssel on relatively short notice please send us your name, address, and telephone number and we will notify you if and when a ride is available that would be convenient for you.



## Letters from our Readers

*We occasionally receive letters that we feel may be useful to other trainees. The following paragraph is taken from such a letter and is reprinted with permission of the writer.*

I think it fair to say that since that retreat my life has changed. A lot of changes have taken place inside, many of which are hard to describe. But I would like to single out one thing and try to describe it. It is faith in the true self. It is learning not to be despondent in the face of one's own faults and worrisome inclinations so that in the face of these one can say to oneself - 'OK this is the case so it is a problem but this is not all of me, there is more to me than this.' Very often before this almost the opposite would happen i.e., again in the face of my own shortcomings, I would say, 'Yes, you have noble ideas but really you are like this.' One of the differences between these two states is that the former is dynamic. It always requires effort - the kind of effort that goes into Zazen.

\* \* \*

*Will the climb to the top never end? Perhaps everyone else was right, perhaps to go off into despair - but I know this is wrong and will not listen to the little voice that says, "Go back. You are too weak, you cannot do it. You have not been good enough to climb this mountain; you have not done enough to train yourself - you do not know how to climb." And I say, "Quiet. I can climb and I will."*

--Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett  
How to Grow a Lotus Blossom

NOTHING MATTERS-  
EXCEPT RELIGIOUS TRAINING

Rev. Teigan Stevens, O.B.C.

In the current Journal of Shasta Abbey the author of one of the articles wrote that a mantra appeared to him during meditation. A mantra is a short phrase or verse, expressing a religious truth or aspiration. It occurs naturally to some people after they have been training for a while and is helpful in reminding them to bring the mind back to meditation. Often the mantra will come from a scripture or other religious writing that is read with regularity. The reason we do religious reading in the mind of meditation is to get beyond the merely intellectual understanding of the words so that the deeper meaning becomes clear. The mantra that occurs naturally is the result of this deeper level of understanding.

In my own case, I have found several instances where a mantra occurred to me at a time of need. One of them was the phrase "Nothing matters", which in its full context is "Nothing matters except religious training." The words came to me as I was preparing for my Kessei, the ceremony that is done to test whether a trainee is ready to become a full priest. Each potential full priest is required during the Kessei ceremony to sum up in a few words his understanding of what his master has taught him during his apprenticeship. I was wondering how to best express what I had learned and so I put the question on the "back-burner"; i.e. raised the question once consciously and simply went about my business without troubling anymore about it, trusting that an answer would come when needed. Incidentally, from my expe-

rience, the speed with which questions like this are answered seem to depend on the urgency of the request. If the person is absolutely desperate, when he raises the question at the beginning of a meditation period, he will get the answer back almost immediately and certainly before the meditation period is through. For less urgent situations the question may not be raised during formal meditation, and the answer may occur in or out of Zazen. In my case, there was ample time before the ceremony so I felt no sense of urgency. One day, the words "nothing matters" came to mind and some thing inside me said that this was how I would epitomize the teaching. The words were used several times in Rev. Rōshi Kennetts' book, How to Grow a Lotus Blossom<sup>1</sup> which I had been reading periodically at the time. Because the mantra was and is so helpful to me, I wrote it down in a pocket note book and continue to refer to it almost daily.

What does it mean? It does not mean "nothing matters so why try." This is the negative, despairing interpretation. Of course we have to do our best every minute; we have to care deeply about every responsibility that comes our way but we don't need to be concerned about a particular outcome. This is to be attached to our standards, our opinions. What it does mean is that no matter what situation one is faced with, no matter how desperate things appear at the moment, the Truth is that they will pass and are of no consequence in the real sense, the spiritual sense. This is the teaching<sup>2</sup> that appears in the Scripture of Kanzeon Bosatsu. If a person faces a fiery pit, drifts upon a great ocean, falls upon a mountain top, is cast down or ringed by enemies, is persecuted, imprisoned, threatened with poison, magic, evil ones, snakes, scorpions, lightening, hailstones, rainstorms, court judgments, all he needs to do is

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1 Shasta Abbey, 1977

2 Zen is Eternal Life, Rev. Rōshi Jiyu-Kennett, Dharma Publishing, 1976 pp. 274-276.



put his mind in meditation and keep it there. The situation will take on an entirely different quality because the suffering has gone out of it. We may still feel the pain of the situation but the terror, anguish and desperation are no longer there and these feelings are what really bother us; these are what we interpret as suffering. For me, when I verbalize "nothing matters", I almost always find myself breathing a great sigh of relief, as the troublesome situation is reduced to a manageable level.

How does this apply to those who are not faced with the great dangers that are enumerated in the Kanzeon Scripture? What if life is filled only with small, annoying and trying situations; a job that is often dreary, acquaintances that sometimes laugh at us or speak against us, inflationary prices, a dreaded dental appointment, a troublesome relationship? The same solution is available: recognize that these minor irritants don't matter, thus putting the mind in meditation. The degree of the problem is irrelevant; major or minor, it is all the same. "In all the world in all the quarters, there is not a place where Kanzeon does not go.... all the pain that comes from birth, [i.e. ordinary, daily life, ed.] old age, disease and death, will for eternity all pass away.\*

A surprising realisation, that will eventually occur to us is that the situations that appear annoying or fearsome are simply warning lights, danger signals reminding us that we have fallen out of meditation. They are really quite useful events because they help pull us out of our non-meditative day-dreaming or internal monologue. When we realise this, the full meaning of the mantra appears: not only do worldly problems not matter; only meditation and religious training matter.

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\* Zen is Eternal Life, p. 275.

## PRIORY NEWS

Retreats. A succesful weekend retreat was held on March 21st-23d at Theresiahoeve, Holland. 18 people attended. Theresiahoeve is a meditation retreat centre near 's Hertogenbosch. Rev. Rokuzan conducted the retreat.

Memorial Ceremonies. Memorial ceremonies were held on March 31st for William Carter, father of Janet Eyer, and for Malwyn Jackson. Our sincere condolences to Janet and the families of the deceased.

Garden. Compost from our own Kitchen and horse manure, kindly donated by a neighbor with a small stable nearby have been dug into much of the ground selected for our garden this year. Some of the berry bushes have been thinned and fertilized with wood ash and we have just planted carrots, broad beans, early peas, parsnips, onions and garlic and assorted flowers. Other crops, such as potatoes, beets, cabbage, will be planted soon.

Safety measures. After a survey of potential trouble spots on the Priory grounds and within our buildings, we have begun taking steps to correct them systematically. We have built handrails for the steps leading up from the Kitchen to the Zendo, reopened the exit door directly from the Zendo to the road outside, placed a guard fence around the woodstove in the dining room, and begun widening the road leading to the Priory at the Limestone Brae Chapel. This involves moving the dry stone wall a bit south so that a fire truck could get up to our buildings from the mainroad.

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## Priory Posters Now Available

Using a drawing created by a member of our congregation, we have had a number of posters printed announcing the function of the Priory. A reduced replica has been printed on the inside back cover of this Journal, with the actual size being 9 x 12½ inches. We would be pleased to send as many posters as people can use for display in schools, libraries, whole food shops and other public bulletin boards.

## The Begging Bowl

In Japan the monks go begging everyday in their local community. This provides an opportunity for everyone to practice humility and generosity. The monks of Throssel Hole Priory go begging through the Journal and through various appeals. This is the acceptable way in the West to do the same thing. Your continued support of the Priory is vital to its existence. This month we hold out our Begging Bowl for items which the Priory could use for the safety and comfort of its residents and guests. The following items would be deeply appreciated: ABC Fire extinguishers; an up-to-date World or European atlas; for the kitchen - pot holders, an asbestos cooking mat, a sharp grater, large wooden spoons and durable rubber spatula-scrapers; useable paint brushes, large and small; a soft-faced hammer.

## Jukai

This year, Jukai, the most solemn of the Zen Buddhist sesshins, is scheduled for August 23 - 29. During this sesshin, the participant resolves to give up past selfish behavior and commits him/her self to following the Ten Great Precepts. Space is limited and so we suggest that those seriously interested in getting on with training, make reservations early.



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